

## PROSPECT; or, *View of the Moral World.*

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SATURDAY, November 17, 1804.

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No. 50.

*Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians. Exodus Chapter 34 & 35.*

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SEVERAL of the verses of this 34th chapter, are taken up in representing a strange and contemptible scheme of prostitution which took place between human beings and the gods. This matter and the delicate manner in which it is expressed may be read in the 16th and other verses adjoining in this chapter. There the pious believer may behold some of the heavenly beauties of holy writ, and feast his fallen pilgrim existence with language and sentiments such as revelation alone discloses to mortal man. The next point worth notice is that of Moses subsisting forty days upon the mount without bread or water and afterward making his appearance among the people with a shining face. It would be difficult in these modern times to find a man whose face would shine after fasting forty days; but every thing in former ages was upon a plan of conjuration, and Moses was not the least of the conjurers of antiquity. He puts a vial upon his face when he talks with the people, and make them believe his face shines with some sort of divine grease. Such barefaced hypocrisy might be swallowed by an ignorant multitude, but would be rejected with disdain in times of enlightened knowledge. In the third verse of the 35th chapter there is a prohibitory command laid down which must of necessity be of partial and local application. It forbids the making of fire on the sabbath day; this might answer within the tropics; but certainly it does not relate to high latitudes in a cold season of the year, and of course whether it be revelation or not we have nothing to do with it. The remaining part of this chapter is taken up with a plan of taxation by which Moses stripped the people of their property, under pretence of its being an offering to the Lord; also a description of the tabernacle, and many other things which have

nothing to do with religion or revelation. It is wholly uninteresting to the present generation, and is probably mixed with more fable and falshood than many other historic details of antiquity. Five chapters more close the book of Exodus; and there is not in all of them a thing that merits any serious attention. They may stand as records of Jewish folly and popular credulity; but it is one of the unaccountable facts of modern times, that an enlightened age should accede to the opinion that these books, Genesis and Exodus, were given to mankind by the spirit of the living God! We now pass them by as wholly unworthy of commanding further serious reflection; they are a compound of folly, falshood and wickedness; it is time they should descend to the tomb of oblivion, and the reason of man rising in all its energy should proclaim an age of science virtue and universal happiness.

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### MAHOMETAN CREED.

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A catechism has lately been printed at Constantinople for the instruction of children educated in the Mahometan Religion. It forms a copious commentary on the tenets of Islamism. The principal articles to which the young Mussulmen is required to give his assent, are comprised in the following declaration:—"I believe in the books which have been delivered from Heaven to the Prophets. In this manner was the Koran given to Mahomet, the Pentateuch to Moses, the Psalter to David, and the Gospel to Jesus.—I believe in the Prophets, and the Miracles which they performed. Adam was the first Prophet, and Mahometan the last, I believe that, for the space of fifty thousand years the righteous shall repose under the shade of the terrestrial Paradise; and that the wicked shall be exposed naked to the burning rays of the sun.—I believe in the bridge Sirat, which passes over the bottomless pit of Hell. It is as fine as a hair, and as sharp



as a Sabre. All must pass over it, and the wicked shall be thrown off.—I believe in the water pools of Paradise. Each of the Prophets has, in Paradadise a bason for his own use; the water is whiter than milk, and sweeter than honey. On the ridge of the pools are vessels to drink out of, and they are bordered with flars. I believe in Heaven and in Hell. The inhabitants of the former know no want, and the Houris who attends them, are never afflicted with sickness. The floor of Paradise is musk, the stones are silver, and the cement gold. The damned are, on the contrary, tormented with fire, and by voracious and poisonous animals.”

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### TO THE EMPEROR OF CHINA.

AUGUST SIRE,

It was my primary intention, after having finished the Verses, which I now lay at your Majesty's feet, to have dedicated them to some Christian Potentate, who should appear the most distinguished, among the crowned heads of Europe, as the friend, protector, and father of his people, and the lover and promoter of peace.

Your Majesty will doubtless acknowledge, that it was most natural for a man born in a Christian country, to seek for such a character and patron among the professed believers in the God and Gospel of Peace, among those who style themselves his Vicegerents on earth, Defenders of the Christian Faith, Most Catholic, Most Faithful, &c.—But, alas! I found them all, either wading in blood, or aiding and abetting the horrid carnage and destruction which for ages have desolated the earth. When I lay for ages, your Majesty will doubtless be surprised, and of course be induced to ask, if the Christian Powers are always at war? To which I am sorry to find that a due respect to truth compels me to answer in the affirmative; and to confess, that the histories of the different European powers ever since their civilization (if they can be said to be civilized who are always cutting each other's

throats) incontestable prove, that all the intervals between the epochas of active war, which they have pretended to consider as a state of peace, ought only to be regarded as truces, during which the different parties have been constantly occupied in seeking new causes of quarrel, and in preparations of fresh havock; it being the policy, or propensity, of Christian Potentates to ruin their own states, in order to injure or acquire those of others; and too often to estimate the value of their dominions, more by the number of acres than of subject. Such is the system of European rules, and such the miserable state of their vassals.

Finding Europe thus employed, and in such a state of never-ceasing confusion, I naturally supposed it was not the place for the muse to look for protection and patronage. I then turned my regard towards Asia, where the greatest sovereign of the greatest empire on earth, who is at the same time the greatest philosopher, historian, and poet, in all his vast dominions, attracted and fixed my attention; —but I contemplated with peculiar veneration and admiration, the copious blessings that flow from a prince who is the father of his people, who is equally distinguished for his good as his great qualities, and who, happily for his people, unites the talents and disposition to make them happy.

*To be continued.*

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*Profession of Faith from Rousseau, concluded.*

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“What! in the same city in which your God was put to death, neither the ancient nor present inhabitants acknowledge his divinity! And yet you would have me



believe it, who was born near two thousand years after the fact, and two thousand leagues distant from the place! Don't you see that, before I can give credit to this book, which you call sacred, and of which I comprehend nothing, I ought to be informed from others, when and by whom it was written, how it hath been preserved and transmitted to you, what is said of it in the country, what are the reasons of those who reject it, though they know as well as you every thing of which you have informed me? You must perceive the necessity I am under, of going first to Europe, to Asia, and unto Palestine, to examine into things myself; and that I must be an idiot to listen to you before I have done this."

Such a discourse as this appears to me not only very reasonable, but I affirm, that every sensible man ought, in such circumstances, to speak in the same manner, and to send a missionary about his business, who should be in haste to instruct and baptize him, before he had sufficiently verified the proofs of his mission. Now, I maintain that there is no revelation against which the same objections might not be made, and that with greater force, than against Christianity. Hence it follows, that if there be in the world but one true religion, and every man be obliged to adopt it, under pain of damnation, it is necessary to spend our lives in the study of all religions, to visit the countries where they have been established, and examine and compare them with each other. No man is exempted from the principal duty of his species, and no one hath a right to confide in the judgment of another. The artisan, who lives only by his industry, the husbandman, who cannot read, the timid and delicate virgin, the feeble valetudinarian, all without exception, must study, meditate, dispute, and travel the world over, in search of truth. There would be no longer any settled inhabitants in a country, the face of the earth being covered by pilgrims, going from place to place, at great trouble and expence, to verify, examine and compare the several different systems and modes of worship to be met with in various

countries. We must, in such a case, bid adieu to arts and sciences, to trade, and all the civil occupations of life. Every other study must give place to that of religion; while the man who should enjoy the greatest share of health and strength, and make the best use of his time and his reason, for the greater term of years allotted to human life, would, in the extreme of old age, be still perplexed were to fix: and it would be a great thing, after all, if he should learn before his death what religion he ought to have believed and practised during life.

Do you endeavour to mitigate the severity of this method, and place as little confidence as possible in the authority of men? In so doing you place the greatest confidence; for if the son of a Christian does right, in adopting, without a scrupulous and impartial examination, the religion of his father, how can the son of a Turk do wrong, in adopting, in the same manner, the religion of Mahomet? I defy all the persecutors in the world to answer this question in a manner satisfactory to any person of common sense. Nay, some of them, when hard pressed by such arguments, will sooner admit that God is unjust, and visits the sins of the fathers on the children, than give up their cruel and persecuting principles. Others, indeed, elude the force of these reasons, by civilly sending an angel to instruct those, who, under invincible ignorance, liveth, nevertheless, good moral lives. A very pretty device, truly, that of the angel! Not contented with subjecting us to their machinery, they would reduce the Deity himself to the necessity of employing it.

See, my son, to what absurdities we are led by pride, and the spirit of persecution, by being puffed up by our own capacity, and conceiving that we possess a greater share of reason than the rest of mankind. I call to witness that God of peace whom I adore, and whom I would make known to you, that my researches have been always sincere: but seeing that they were, and always must be, unsuccessful, and that I was launched out into a boundless ocean of perplexity, I returned the way I came, and



confined my creed within the limits of my first notions. I could never believe that God required me, under pain of damnation, to be so very learned. I therefore shut up all my books : that of nature lies open to every eye. It is from this sublime and wonderful volume that I learn to serve and adore its divine Author. No person is excusable for neglecting to read in this book, as it is written in an universal language, intelligible to all mankind. Had I been born in a desert island, or never seen a human creature beside myself; had I never been informed of what had formerly happened in a certain corner of the world; I might yet have learned, by the exercise and cultivation of my reason, and by the proper use of those faculties God hath given me, to know and love him; I might hence have learned to love and admire his power and goodness, and to have discharged my duty here on earth.

Such is the involuntary scepticism in which I remain : this scepticism, however, is not painful to me, because it extends not to any essential point of practice; and as my mind is firmly settled regarding the principles of my duty, I serve God in the sincerity of my heart. In the mean time, I seek not to know any thing more than what relates to my moral conduct; and as to those dogmas, which have no influence over the behaviour, and which many persons give themselves so much trouble about, I am not at all solicitous concerning them.

Thus, my young friend, have I given you, with my own lips, a recital of my creed, such as the supreme Being reads it in my heart. You are the first person to whom I have made this profession : you are also the only one, perhaps, to whom I shall ever make it.

You are now arrived at that critical term of life, in which the mind opens itself to conviction, in which the heart receives the form and character, which it bears during life, whether good or ill. Its substance grows afterwards hard, and receives no new impressions. Now is the time, therefore to impress on your mind the seal of truth. If I were not positive in myself, I should have

assumed a more decisive and dogmatical air; but, what can I do more? I have opened to you my heart, without reserve: what I have thought certain, I have given you as such; my doubts I have declared as doubts, my opinions as opinions; and have given you my reasons for both. It remains, now, for you to judge; you have taken time; this precaution is wise, and make me think well of you. Begin by bringing your conscience to a state desirous of being enlightened. Be sincere with yourself. Adopt those of my sentiments which you are persuaded are true, and reject the rest. You are not yet so much depraved by vice to run the risk of making a bad choice. I should propose to confer together sometimes on these subjects; but as soon as ever we enter into disputes we grow warm; obstinacy and vanity interfere, and sincerity is banished. For my own part, it was not till after several years of meditation that my sentiments became fixed; these, however, I still retain, my conscience is easy, and I am content. Were I desirous to begin a new examination into the truth of these sentiments, I could not do it with a more sincere love to truth; and my mind, at present less active, would be less in a state to discover it. I purpose, therefore, to remain as I am, lest my taste for contemplation should become insensibly an idle passion; lest it should make me indifferent to the discharge of my practical duties. Above half my life is already spent, the remainder will not afford me time more than sufficient to repair my errors by my virtues. If I am mistaken, it is not wilfully. That Being, who searches the hearts of men, knows that I am not fond of ignorance. But under my present incapacity to instruct myself better, the only method that remains for me to extricate myself, is a good life.

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